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## Replaying the Record on Indochina

We all have been alternately titillated and appalled in recent months by recitations of quotations about Vietnam that look ludicrous under the cruel microscope of hindsight.

The nation listens solemnly when Spiro Agnew says of the North Vietnamese on nationwide television: "They have been in a war for years and years and they are quite debilitated and decimated, and I don't think they are capable with any kind of resistance of continuing this fight."

Then some mean chap, surely lacking in "patriotism," recalls out loud that on March 20, 1954, Gen. Paul Ely, the French chief of staff, said: "If the Communists continue to suffer the losses they have been taking, I don't know how they can stay in the battle."

For all who like to play this game of impaling politicians, diplomats, statemen and generals on their own rhetoric, Random House has just published a delightfully dismaying grab bag of "Quotations Vietnam: 1945-1970."

Whomever you dislike, Democrat or Republican, if he has been deeply involved in the Vietnam situation, you will find enough of his words in this compilation by William G. Effros to make him look like a fool, a liar or a forked-tongue snake doctor who speaks out of three sides of his mouth.

We get the sardonic humor of Lyndon Baines Johnson standing in the Senate in 1954, deploring "the dismal series of reversals and confusions and alarms and excursions" regarding Vietnam.

"We will insist that we and the American people be treated as adults—that we have the facts without the sugar coating," said Johnson, who 14 years later would find that Vietnam had become the tragedy of his long career because the public felt he had sugar-coated a calamity.

But this little book has value far beyond the embarrassment potential for politicians. It says something about the way political and personal pressures induce the greatest of men to deceive themselves or to take actions that their inner selves know to be foolhardy.

Why, in June 1952, would Dwight D. Eisenhower say of Indochina, "I would never send troops there," and then in February 1954, as president, acknowledge that "the United States has military missions in Indochina." Why, after leaving the presidency, would he publicly support Johnson's commitment of hundreds of thousands of American combat troops?

This book tells us that the pressure of events may be far different from what a would-be leader expects, and the pressures of a president in office, like Johnson, pleading for unity may be so great that tomorrow's actions become just the opposite of yesterday's promise.

Or political loyalty in one year may produce a stance quite different from that of a later period when political opposition comes into play. Or perhaps there is a better explanation as to why the late Robert F. Kennedy, as attor-

ney general and confidant to his brother, the President, would say in Saigon in February 1962: "We are going to win in Vietnam. We will remain here until we win." Yet, after Johnson became president, Kennedy would become a harsh critic of the war effort.

Perhaps the answer is simply that Robert F. Kennedy learned from the passage of time.

If so, that made him pretty unique for, according to Effros' devastating collection of quotations, few people learned anything from recent history.

Take the issue of whether the president can wage war without it being declared by Congress.

Way back in March 1954 Eisenhower said: "There is going to be no involvement of America in war unless it is a result of the constitutional process that is placed upon Congress to declare it. Now let us have that clear."

Eight years and four days later John F. Kennedy said: "I would go to Congress before committing combat troops."

Still, eight more years later the Senate ties itself up for two months and the country is split into two angry camps over the question of whether President Nixon may again send troops into Cambodia without the consent of Congress.

We put half a million U.S. troops into Indochina without anyone ever going to Congress the way Eisenhower and Kennedy said they would. How do such things happen? Maybe the answer lies in a remark by former Vice President Hubert Humphrey in Tokyo last October:

"We jumped into this area without knowing what we were jumping into."

Many a reader of Effros' little book, which so meanly leaves politicians naked to the truth, will conclude that politicians and lovers should never permit anything to be reduced to writing.

But there is more than that to this book. You read the quotations on "who's winning?" or the long line of predictions of massive Communist attacks that never occur, and you get the feeling that someone has been snow-jobbing you for 15 years. You might even vow to be less gullible next time around.